

a first stage saponification process, comprised in turn of a primary saponification reaction, in which a saponification reaction is carried out by mixing the polyvinyl ester in the alcohol-containing organic solvent under the presence of a saponification catalyst and

a subsequent secondary saponification reaction, in which a saponification reaction is carried out while distilling off the carboxylic ester that is produced; and

a subsequent second stage saponification process, comprised in turn of a primary saponification reaction, in which a saponification reaction is carried out by mixing the polyvinyl ester in the alcohol-containing organic solvent under the presence of a saponification catalyst and

a subsequent secondary saponification reaction, in which a saponification reaction is carried out while distilling off the carboxylic ester that is produced.

Please add the following new Claims 55-60:

55. (New) A method of producing polyvinyl alcohol polymer comprising:
saponification of a polyvinyl ester in an alcohol-containing organic solvent under the presence of a saponification catalyst, wherein saponification is carried out with a mole ratio of alcohol with respect to polyvinyl alcohol of 1.0 to 3.0, while distilling off the carboxylic ester produced by the saponification reaction, wherein said saponification comprises:

a first stage saponification process, comprised in turn of a primary saponification reaction, in which a saponification reaction is carried out in a kneader mixer by mixing the polyvinyl ester in the alcohol-containing organic solvent under the presence of a saponification catalyst and

a subsequent secondary saponification reaction, in which a saponification reaction is carried out in a tower reactor while distilling off the carboxylic ester that is produced; and

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a subsequent second stage saponification process, comprised in turn of a primary saponification reaction, in which a saponification reaction is carried out in a kneader mixer by mixing the polyvinyl ester in the alcohol-containing organic solvent under the presence of a saponification catalyst and

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a subsequent secondary saponification reaction, in which a saponification reaction is carried out in a shell and tube evaporator while distilling off the carboxylic ester that is produced.

56. (New) The method of Claim 55, wherein the degree of saponification attained in said primary saponification reaction of the first stage is 70 mole% or more and the concentration of the polyvinyl alcohol polymer in the saponification reaction solution is 10 wt% or more.

57. (New) The method of Claim 55, wherein the degree of saponification attained in said secondary saponification reaction of the first stage is 85 mole% or more and the concentration of the polyvinyl alcohol polymer in the saponification reaction solution is 10 wt% or more.

58. (New) The method of Claim 55, wherein the degree of saponification attained in said primary saponification reaction of the second stage is 93 mole% or more and the concentration of the polyvinyl alcohol polymer in the saponification reaction solution is 10 wt% or more.

59. (New) The method of Claim 55, wherein the degree of saponification attained in said secondary saponification reaction of the second stage is 99 mole% or more and the concentration of the polyvinyl alcohol polymer in the saponification reaction solution is 10 wt% or more.